

# ALAMEDA COUNTY COUNCIL FOR AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

## Suicide Prevention in Alameda County - Talking Points

*When meeting with policymaker or community members who are interested in public policy, these talking points will provide key messages about Suicide Prevention, what it looks like in Alameda County, and recommendations from the Council for Age Friendly Communities. Pair the Talking Points with the Suicide Prevention Issue Brief and Fact Sheet for maximum impact.*

- Depression and persistent bereavement are not part of normal aging – they are, however, factors that can increase risk of suicide.
- Individuals 65 and older currently have the highest rate of suicide deaths in the nation – 1 in 4 older Americans who attempt suicide die, compared to 1 in 200 in younger age groups.
- Unfortunately, mental health disorders among older adults are too often overlooked due to stigma, misinformation, and ageism.
- Older adults themselves often feel shame about having mental illness, or they misunderstand their symptoms, and so do not seek treatment.
- When older adults do seek help, they are more likely to visit a primary care provider reporting physical symptoms like fatigue, weight loss, or disrupted sleep. Unless the provider is alert to this “atypical” presentation, diagnosis and early treatment can be missed. Fully half of older adults who die by suicide had contact with their primary care provider within one month prior to the suicide.
- Suicide risk factors are known. In addition to depression, they include loss of a loved one, employment, or independence; illness, disability or pain; financial stress; substance abuse; polypharmacy; and membership in a marginalized population.
- We need to improve statistical tracking of suicide deaths in Alameda County. There are no consensus measures for tracking or reporting suicide statistics, and Alameda County does not differentiate between age groups over 65.
- Practical next steps can take us closer to preventing suicide among older adults in our County. These include building the capability of community-based and in-home services providers to identify at-risk older adults; implementing routine standard screening for depression and suicidal ideation in all clinical settings; establishing standards of care for integrated multidisciplinary treatment; providing outreach, assessment and support for high-risk older adults; and informing the public about suicide warning signs, safe reporting, stigma and ageism.

See more detailed recommendations and learn more about the issue in our county by checking out the Issue Brief developed by the [Alameda County Council for Age Friendly Communities](#).